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Theatrical translations: the performative production of diaspora

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Introduction

Conceptualisations of diaspora have provided conflicting understandings of its materiality. On the one hand diaspora can appear as a solid and demarcated entity, encompassing a dislocated population with an obvious 'home' nation (Cohen 1997). On the other hand the term can be more suggestive of an imagination, a fluid and transient state that describes an experience rather than a particular population (Blunt 2007). This duplicity of the term, the opposition between diaspora as a descriptive-analytical category and as a lived condition (King & Christou 2010), is what continues to make it useful. The potential for diaspora to invoke both a stability and an instability means that it remains a helpful lens for considering displaced populations, regardless of how recently the event of dislocation occurred. In this 'process' of diaspora (Mavroudi 2007), the ongoing resonances of the rupture of displacement can be as much of a binding force for diasporic populations as the attachments to the home country. The historical dispersal of African populations as a result of the transatlantic slave trade provides a salient example. For some, there is a sense that the African and later African-Caribbean diaspora has no clear national home, but is rather orientated around the shared experience of absence (West 1990, Hesse 1990). This chapter considers the duplicitous materiality of diaspora through a focus on those of African-Caribbean heritage living in the city of Bristol in southwest England. It demonstrates how the contingency of diaspora, its potential to appear both solid and fluid, operates as a tool for coping with the uncertain meaning of belonging when the durable norm is adaptation (Berlant 2011). That is, diaspora can be both evoked and revoked as a response to precarity, to the fraying of norms, to the dissolving coherence of forms of national and ethnic attachment that are historically constituted but seemingly no longer produce a coherent collective consciousness.

Such flexibility of diaspora requires an approach that foregrounds historical and geographical specificity to understand its significance. It is necessary to examine the complexities of the grounded experience through which the idea and condition of diaspora are lived. To do this, the chapter will draw on one example of artistic performance practice by a group who identify as of 'African-Caribbean' heritage in Bristol. Performance provides a useful lens for diaspora for two reasons. Firstly, through recovery and imaginative projection, it contributes to the processes of collective memory that are vital to diasporic experience (Goyal 2012). Acts of remembering home maintain the bonds of diaspora; whether through engagements with objects (Tolia-Kelly 2004), food (Duruz 2010) or music (Richardson 2013). Performance enables such practices through its function of 'surrogation' (Roach 1996). This is the way performance involves a continual process of standing in for an elusive entity that it is not, but that it must vainly aspire to embody and replace. Secondly, and relatedly, performance has the potential to provide an aesthetic or sense that dramatises the present condition. That is, to paraphrase Berlant, it can offer a 'formal rendering' of affective experience. In this sense, the 'unmarked' nature of performance draws attention to 'the captured' and 'not captured' in any moment (Phelan 1993), opening up the manners in which representation and lived experience interact. Therefore, as 'live bodily investment' (Simpson 2008: 809), performance might be understood as anti-objectivist, providing a way of engaging with the world to explore how we are embedded in and co-constitute knowledge. So this chapter uses performances to blur the distinction between diaspora as an analytical category and as a lived condition.

Under question is how diaspora comes to mean and matter in the present. That is, the ways in which the ongoing event of diaspora might be rendered sensible. Specifically, performance is explored as a situated creative practice that can reinforce, adapt and detach from connections with an elsewhere. Such creativity is a contingent process that upholds the uncertain materiality of diaspora. Rather than simply rehearsing the past, performance reworks sensations, stories and practices of home in a new context. The chapter draws on ethnographic

and interview material with an African-Caribbean theatre group called the Malcom X Elders undertaken over a ten month period. The Elders took their name from the Malcom X Community Centre in St Paul's, an area of Bristol that has an historical association with African-Caribbean population that will be further detailed below. I was present during the composition, rehearsal and performance of a play that recounted stories exploring their journey to Bristol from the Caribbean. The Elders worked with a Bristol-based community arts organisation called ACTA to develop this. Interview material with the artistic director of ACTA, as well as my observations of the development process, are used to consider the instability of diaspora. The chapter focuses on the aesthetics of performance to elucidate this tricky materiality of diaspora. Drawing on Berlant (2011) the suggestion is that diaspora might be understood as a precarious condition, with an indeterminate presence that is aesthetically rendered. Before developing this understanding of aesthetics, a brief overview of the notion of an African-Caribbean diaspora will be outlined, followed by a note on the specifics of the Bristol case. Three formal renderings of diaspora will then be put forward through a discussion of the Malcom X Elders practice.

African (-Caribbean) Diaspora

The African diaspora frames no simple relationship between home and host nation. In the 'here' and 'there' of diaspora, 'there is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation' (Clifford 1997: 269). The notion of an African-Caribbean diaspora illustrates this uncertainty as there is no obvious descriptive-analytical category, no clear 'nation-state' from which Africans are dispersed. Instead, there is a 'history of transportation, slavery and migration' that necessitates the imaginary coherence of 'Africa as the name of the missing term' (Hall 1990: 224). Such an orientation was the foundation of the Pan-African movement (Griffith 1975), and also served as the basis for 'Negritude' as a rejection of French colonial racism (Cesaire 1972). Both these movements, along with Black Power in the USA, drew to differing

degrees on an essential notion of Blackness that attempted to resolve what West (1990: 26) called 'the modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness'. However, whilst this assertion of Blackness through an African origin story was a mode of anti-racist political mobilisation; it risked accepting White conventions in two ways. On the one hand it struck a moralistic tone that drew on the similarities between Black people and White people in order to gain White acceptance. On the other, the evocation of roots tends towards homogenisation, erasing difference between Black people. The inadequacies of this framing of diaspora through essentialisms resulted in a recognition of the many differences that constitute what it means to be Black. A more fluid conceptualisation of the African diaspora emerged (Hall 1990; Gilroy 1993), inflected by the multiple movements across the Atlantic that resulted in the increased Black presence in Britain post-1945.

The UK had neither the Black Power nor the Civil Rights movements that had framed the struggle for African-American recognition. Instead, the dominant narrative of Black presence in the UK takes the Windrush as its origin, a step removed from the history of enslavement that marks race relations in the USA. One result of this is that Black Britishness has been articulated through spaces of narrative displacement and interruptions to historiographic continuity (Hesse 2000). The anti-racist movement in the UK took shape 'along the lines of multicultural solidarity, rather than reactive ethnic specificity as in the USA' (Dawson 2007: 53). Whilst in the 1970s groups like the 'Race Today Collective', associated with the Notting Hill Carnival, promoted African-Caribbean identity, they were staking a claim to Black Britishness, not renewing their ties with elsewhere. Thus, in Gilroy's concept of the 'Black Atlantic' and in Hall's understanding of cultural identity as continuity and rupture, there is a sense of the circulations that both constitute and disrupt Black experience. Any conception of an African-Caribbean diaspora must therefore exceed binary oppositions of 'past/present', 'here/there'. Instead, 'at different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited' (Hall 1990: 228). This is a similar reading to that of Brah's (1996)

‘diasporic space’ as a situated and historically contingent phenomenon. Movements between the Americas, Europe and Africa produce a particular cultural politics meaning that diaspora exceeds the static spatio-temporalities that construct the nation. Without the space for extended discussion of this (post)colonial history here, the importance of these circulations is suggested by Glissant’s (1989) use of ‘creolisation’. This perspective shows the emergence of the African-Caribbean diaspora through ongoing entanglements that are part of the struggle for a decolonised identity. The overarching sense of diaspora across these approaches is one of fluidity and complexity that necessitates a focus on how attachments across space and time are played out in practice, as explored below.

Bristol’s African-Caribbean Diaspora

The lived experience of the African-Caribbean diaspora in Bristol is grounded in the city’s contentious past. Bristol’s history can be characterised by circulation. Briefly the major slaving port in eighteenth century England (then second to Liverpool (Brown 2005)), the city grew through wealth largely generated by the transatlantic trade. Bristol’s location meant that it was well suited for both Atlantic exports and imports, one of the most influential being tobacco. This past entanglement with slavery makes an appearance in the present. It plays a part in contemporary framings of Bristol’s ‘diversity’ as described on *the majesty of smallness* blog in the post ‘Bristol, give me a signal’ (Schraer 2013):

“It’s a city that still bears the scrawled markings of its slave trade past: the main shopping centre named after a dynasty of slave owners, the harbourside thrumming with a history that echoes of sugar, tobacco and human traffic in the shadow of the old Fry’s chocolate factory, and you can stroll down Black Boy Hill as it slopes gently into Whiteladies Road (I’m not being facetious, that’s an actual geographical fact). But you’ve taken your historic mould and twisted and writhed from it in happy contortions.”

So there is a sense that Bristol's slaving past is somehow positively connected to a present of multicultural diversity. Yet, both this multicultural present and its positive connection to the city's history can be challenged. Bristol is not especially ethnically diverse in comparison to other cities in the UK. According to the 2011 census Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents make up 13.5% of the population, significantly fewer than Birmingham (42 per cent); London (40 per cent) and Manchester (33 per cent). In addition, far from being the basis of a healthy 'diversity' there is a suggestion that this past has led to divisions. The city's role in the eighteenth century slave trade continues to cause controversy. The 2008 *Report of the Abolition 200 Steering group* states that this means '(for some) being Black in Bristol' requires walking 'around with a lot of baggage' (p. 11).

Within this context, diaspora can appear as a frame for securing belonging by making present, and perhaps working through, the past. It draws attention to the circulations of Bristol's history by grounding contemporary belonging in migration. Diaspora is suggestive of an 'elsewhere', a constitutive part of belonging in Bristol that somehow lies beyond it. It makes movement a vital condition for understanding the diversity of the present. Simultaneously though, diaspora also plays to the more ambivalent framing of belonging for non-White residents in Bristol. The complex and often uncertain histories and geographies of the African-Caribbean diaspora are evoked in the 'baggage' reportedly carried by some in the city. Thus diaspora operates as an indeterminate frame that can both stabilise and destabilise, reinforcing and undermining the importance of (national) origin. It occurs as one means of emphasising 'the margins, the unfixed spaces in-between states and subject positions' (Mitchell 1997: 536). The practices of the Malcom X Elders theatre group help to illustrate this dynamic. The group was composed of nine women, most of whom were aged in their 70s. With two community arts workers, the Elders composed a play called 'We Have Overcome'. This contained scenes from the individual stories recounted by the women about their experiences of moving to England from the West Indies (predominantly Jamaica) in the

1950s and 1960s. On the one hand, the ‘first-generation’ status of this group meant that the ‘elsewhere’ of diaspora had a specific location and national framework – Jamaica – or as they often referred to it, ‘home’. On the other hand, this connection beyond Bristol was often the cause for uncertain or precarious positionings within it, as will be further explored below.

Performing Diaspora

The uncertain materiality of diaspora can be brought to light through the aesthetics of performance. That is, performance can provide a sense of the tricky matter of diasporic relations, the ways in which they can seem simultaneously light and weighty. The understanding of aesthetics drawn on here is that of a ‘theory-in-practice’, constituted by the patterning of affect (Berlant 2011). Berlant argues that affect saturates the ‘corporeal, intimate and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere something palpable’ and through this ‘releases to view a poetics’ (p. 16). Thus, focusing on the aesthetics of performance enables the ‘feeling out’ (p. 17) of the conditions of the diaspora. Precarity as ‘adaptation to the adaptive imperative’ (Berlant 2011: 195) might describe this diasporic condition. It is suggestive of the resignation to change; the necessity to fit in or be fitted by unstable boundaries just to keep going. A variety of approaches to precarity exist, some of which position it primarily as an economic and political state (Neilson and Rossiter 2008), whilst others have seen it more as an ontological condition (Butler 2004). Most salient to the discussion in this chapter is Berlant’s (2011) understanding of the term. For her, precarity is an affective state that is also aesthetically rendered; it requires a sense that dramatises the situation of the present. Thus, like the understanding of diaspora put forward here, a precarious condition is one constituted by an ambiguous materiality. It describes a mood, an affective orientation or atmosphere that marks the present state as one of indefinite attachments. To elucidate this precarity of diaspora, three ‘aesthetic’ aspects of the Malcom X Elders practice can be isolated: collaborating, articulating and learning. These are formal

renderings of affective experience that demonstrate how diaspora materialises: how it is felt and embodied, but also how it is challenged and exceeded.

Taking *collaborating* to begin with, the Malcom X Elders theatre group functioned through connections both beyond the ‘African-Caribbean community’ through ACTA, the community arts organisation, and also within it through the Malcom X Community Centre. A number of members of the wider Malcom X Elders Forum started to rehearse when the White male artistic director of ACTA was:

“approached by a community development worker, I think it was 2005, saying that she had been working with the Malcom X Elders to create a book based on their experiences of moving to England in the 60s. And they had said how they thought it would make a good play, piece of theatre. And the community development worker knew about ACTA’s work, knew that was what we did and asked us to a meeting with Gloria, who is the chairperson of the Elder’s Forum.” (Interview with the ACTA artistic director)

This initial meeting resulted in a long running relationship between the Elders and ACTA that continues to produce original pieces of theatre. The necessity for collaboration lay in part in the expertise brought by the artistic director, and his co-worker, who had family ties to the African-Caribbean community in St Paul’s but had subsequently moved outside of Bristol. It also lay in the apparent neutrality of the artistic director as someone external to the group, who was not entirely privy to its internal politics, and therefore was able to adjudicate and push along the processes of artistic composition and execution. In the past the group had tried to work independently but it had failed, mainly because of internal arguments.

Collaborating therefore involved moving beyond the bounds of diasporic experience, but also demonstrated the desire to render sensible attachments wrought in and to the past. In

particular, past and present conflicts were orientated around the Malcom X Community Centre in St Paul's. The site for the Elders' rehearsals, the centre was built by Bristol City Council following the 'race riots' in St Paul's in 1980, and was renamed after Malcom X by those in the area after many felt it had been imposed without adequate consultation (Dresser & Flemming 2008). Thus the centre both symbolically and practically reinforced the attachments of the African-Caribbean diaspora in Bristol. In the past, and now less frequently, Caribbean music nights were held at the centre, making it something of a party venue, especially at Carnival time. However, whilst I was in Bristol there was a great deal of uncertainty around the future of the centre. In part, this was financial: at the 2012 AGM it was stated that reliance on funding through grants was no longer an option; the centre was down to two staff working two days a week. Equally though, there was uncertainty around the diasporic community the centre served in St Paul's. The older African-Caribbean ties seemed to be loosening through the generations and meanwhile a Somali support group had started regularly using the venue. The physicality of the centre therefore marked absences, both the historical lack of investment in the African-Caribbean community associated with St Paul's and the contemporary dissolution and reconfiguration of those attachments. Within this context, the collaboration of the Elders with ACTA might be understood as a necessity. ACTA had the institutional capacity to fund and produce an activity associated with the centre, which also worked to reinforce the centre's connections with African-Caribbean migration.

However, this collaboration was not favoured by some in the wider Elders Forum. The Elders Forum met every Monday morning at the Malcom X Centre. The group was composed predominantly, but not exclusively of women, many of whom were first generation migrants from the Caribbean. Although they meet at the centre in St Paul's, most live in other areas of Bristol and so must travel by car to get there. This additional effort is indicative of the importance of both the Malcom X Centre and St Paul's to the memory and presence of Black

struggle in Bristol. The Forum itself was a space for informal discussion amongst this community between and during activities such as knitting and reading, followed by a lunch which was made by the members. The lunch then bled into the rehearsals for the theatre group with ACTA in a smaller room off the main hall. Whilst this movement initially appeared fairly neutral, over my time with the group it became clear that it was a point of contention. The theatre group consisted of nine women, which was less than half of the regular attendees of the Elders Forum. However, theatre was the only afternoon activity offered for the Elders, as organised by the chair of the Forum (who was a member of the theatre group). This was creating a real and perceived division in the Forum. A large number of the Elders did not want to do (or feel capable of doing) theatre, but there was no alternative afternoon activity. As a result, the majority would leave the centre once lunch was over. The corollary of this routine was the perception by the 'outsiders' that the theatre group was somehow exclusive, undoing the existing community attachments. So collaboration seemingly both reinforced and undermined diasporic ties, through the processes involved in rendering manifest a shared yet interrupted history (Hesse 2000).

A second formal rendering; which was *articulating*; predominantly worked to solidify this sense of shared history, strengthening diasporic connections. Articulation through the act of telling stories formed the basis of the Elder's shows. In order to make 'We Have Overcome', as mentioned above, the Elders told stories about the period of their migration to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. The broad narrative ark of the piece was then set out by the main community arts worker, with the agreement of the Elders. This loosely divided the content of the stories that the Elders were to give into two areas: firstly their experiences of leaving the West Indies, and secondly what happened on arrival to England. The telling of stories was often a combined effort, for although each of the Elders had unique experiences, they tended to share similar problems and responses. So whilst individual anecdotes were told in rehearsals and ended up in the show, many of the stories were combinations of a number of

the Elders' experiences, of for example, working as a nurse in Bristol. Therefore such storytelling was not necessarily linear: stories from different times overlapped to some degree and the exact shape of a story was played out through performance (Tolia-Kelly 2011).

This was partly because the Elders tended to forget this level of specificity, but also because of their strengths as improvisers:

"If we wrote it down it would take three times as long to do the process, and it wouldn't be as good because actually what they say naturally is a lot better than certainly I could write. I mean even if I was trying to take down verbatim what they did in one session and use that as a script, next time it came round, they wouldn't say the same thing. Having what they said the first time written down would just confuse them. So when I work with that group, we always leave it loose." (Interview with ACTA artistic director)

However, although the Elders shared apparently 'natural' acting abilities, reaching a consensus on the content and presentation of stories was not always possible. This partly concerned the accuracy of a story, but also setting the appropriate 'tone' of a narration for a contemporary audience. In one particular rehearsal a number of group members felt uncomfortable over the appropriateness of a particular scene for a contemporary audience as this excerpt from my field notes recounts:

[The artistic director] encourages each member of the group to come up with a little anecdote that described their first experience of England. These end up being mainly 'negative differences' that Neil suggests should be summed up by the phrase 'we wouldn't do that at home'. This causes discord amongst the group, particularly with regard to the story of their disgust on finding English people washing their knickers in the kitchen sink. A couple of members asked whether it would offend people in the audience, saying that they didn't want to make the audience feel uncomfortable. [The artistic director] tells them not to worry – what is compelling is that you found it different and that is culturally interesting.

So these forms of articulation worked to render diaspora present through the performance of particular histories of African-Caribbean migration to Bristol. This was achieved through the mobilisation of a specific aesthetic, namely non-linear and poly-vocal storytelling, but also in the act of recuperating the past. The bringing forth of memory was important here, but equally significant was the contestation of this process. Putting together the show played out the contests over the bounds of diaspora, over how and in what ways the past should configure the conditions of belonging in the present.

The final manner of rendering diaspora sensible is *learning*. This is the process through which the Elders seek to ensure diasporic connections are maintained in future generations. The Elders performed 'We Have Overcome' in a number of different contexts: to a predominantly African-Caribbean community, to a White community and also in schools. One aim of the performances was therefore to maintain the bonds of the African-Caribbean community in Bristol through rehearsing their shared history of migration. A key element of this again occurred through the matter and meaning of the Malcom X Centre; through sustaining its connections with the historical experiences of African-Caribbean migration. ACTA tried to ensure that each new project involved staging a show at the centre because this was felt to tie stories of migration to familial relations, bringing together the community. This involved the transformation of the centre:

"We, ACTA, we went in and we made the whole place into a theatre. We put in a seating unit and lights and we put out 120 seats and the Elders came in on the night of the performance and said 'that's not enough'. And we said 'oh well you know, we're quite used to this sort of thing and usually 120 will be good if we can get 120 in'. 'Won't be enough'. And they were right. We had the whole place completely rammed from the floor to the ceiling. I mean there's a balcony in the Malcom X Centre and we had people standing four deep on the balcony

[laughs]. Everyone in that community turned out to see that show.” (Interview with ACTA artistic director)

The attempt to create and maintain forms of attachment by providing a history also occurred through performances beyond the African-Caribbean community. The artistic director of ACTA stated that number of the Elders had been motivated to start the theatre group so that their performances could educate the younger generation (their grandchildren) who they felt were behaving inappropriately to new, often Somali children in the city. During my time with the group, ‘We Have Overcome’ was performed in one school, with the intention of doing more performances in the autumn. The school performance that I attended finished with a short question and answer session between the cast and the students about the Elders’ experiences. Here, learning worked to render significant the migration defining diaspora, but also pointed to importance of connections beyond this.

In this case, looking beyond diaspora was a crucial part of the anti-racist politics at work in the Elders performances, although this was never explicitly stated. Performing was not easy for the Elders, some were very shy at the beginning of the composition process and even the more experienced in the group got nervous before performances. Yet despite these difficulties, the Elders were determined to create a show and perform it. This motivation to speak of their experiences did not equate to preaching. The Elders told their stories with humour, often in a matter-of-fact way. Emerging through this, though, were occasional and often subtle insights into the discrimination and hardship they suffered as a result of being Black in Britain: the unrecognised qualifications, the poor quality housing. Despite this, the play ended with the statement that the Elders had overcome these challenges and that England was now their home. Therefore the Elders demonstrate the precarious balancing act of diaspora. On the hand, diaspora appears as a means of challenging and pluralising the history

of White Britain. On the other, diaspore is underplayed when stories of migration risk positioning the Elders as outsiders to the Britain.

Conclusion: the Inconstancy of Diaspora

Diaspora has an uncertain materiality; it is at once solid and demarcated yet simultaneously fluid and transient. The performance practices of the Malcom X Elders in Bristol have illustrated this volatility. Diaspora has appeared as a precarious condition, which for the Elders means an indeterminate present created by the differing pulls of the West Indies and Britain. A sense of this contingency is given through three formal renderings of the Elders' practice: collaborating, articulating and learning. Thus, the focus on performance in this chapter has sought to elucidate the tricky materiality of diaspora through a focus on aesthetics. Berlant's (2011) framing of aesthetics helps in understanding how performance plays out the complexity of displacement. So on the one hand an African-Caribbean diaspora is performatively achieved through the Elders' practice, through their gathering of people and telling of stories that demarcate a collective. The connection with an elsewhere is realised both in and beyond the act of performance. On the other hand, such a sense or an appearance of collective attachment is constantly undone by the myriad of pulls in the present. The situated practices of performance require a pragmatic engagement that always produces connections in excess of diaspora. The aesthetic sheds light on this contingent materiality of diaspora, providing a sense of how it is felt and embodied but also how it is challenged and exceeded. This potential for excess means that diaspora is one frame for the performance of the Malcom X Elders, but it does not exhaust their experience. There is a raft of other ties, of alternative lines of attachment, which come to matter at different times. In an era of 'crisis ordinariness' (Berlant 2011: 196), diaspora might provide one orientation for attachment, one way that 'people try to maintain themselves until they figure out how to adjust' (*ibid.* p. 195).

The question that arises here concerns the weight of diaspora in society in light of this unstable materiality. If, as in the examples above, diaspora has a substance that can be both done and undone, then it must have an influence in delineating social positions. That is, diasporic connections can provide both blockages and opportunities for 'getting on' in the 'host' country. In part this concerns the 'material' factors such as remittances, or conversely financial support from 'home' that can limit or facilitate openings in the 'host' country. But equally, the problem or potential of diasporic connections is also tied to the less tangible but just as significant modes of belonging in or to the 'host' country. At stake is the duration of diaspora, how long it matters and with what implications. Those in the Elders were British citizens. The reality of diaspora was seemingly greater for them than that of their children and grandchildren. Yet, for those second and third generation migrants the sense of diaspora can be equally, if differently, important for constructing an ethnic identity (Reynolds 2006). As indicated with the Elders, identifying with diaspora can hold a symbolic significance for ongoing anti-racist politics. That is, attaching to the African-Caribbean diaspora can appear to provide a unitary force against racism. However diaspora may also operate as a means of sharing displacement, of understanding how subjugation has occurred through movement and dispersal as well as fixity and concentration. In each of these cases the invocation of diaspora has an uncertain presence within Britain. If connecting with diaspora was a form of resistance, it was often a tacit one without a clearly articulated target. By both challenging and subscribing to the unity of the nation, the Elders' performances provide a good illustration of this problem.

So there is an unavoidable ambivalence to the performance of migration stories (Hoskins 2010). Flagging up an elsewhere can both undermine and reinforce present positions. Understanding diaspora as an indeterminate entity, as neither completely material nor ideal, indicates how such a paradoxical position can occur. Diaspora is given weight through actions that attempt imaginative or material connection with an elsewhere. If successful, such a

connection can do two things. It may upset and undo the bounds of the current situation, in this case the framework of the nation. Equally it might replicate or reproduce these bounds through the act of connection, that is by supporting another nation. Yet if these attempts to connect elsewhere fail, or are inconstant, then another set of possibilities is opened up. One is the acceptance or maintenance of the current situation, that is the accommodations of the 'host' nation. The other functions as a more substantive challenge to the nation by rejecting it as an entity towards which to orientate. If diasporic connections fail, attachments to the nation can be negated or superseded when other forms of belonging provide more insistent pulls. So through this instability of diaspora, the nation remains significant in constituting locations but is always also under threat. The inconstancy of diasporic connection is indicative of how any contemporary politics of position continues to invoke the nation but always also exceeds these constraints. That is, the possibility of Britain as an 'open creolised complexity' means that it cannot be contained by the 'narrow requirements of nationalism and identity' (Chambers 2008: 55). Diaspora must be understood as one frame for such complexity that shows how attachments can work at, within and beyond the nation.

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